

## Getting to Gravitas: The Business Sweet Spot

Joan Steinberg, Morgan Stanley's Global Head of Philanthropy, was quoted in The Glass Hammer recently emphasizing the importance of projecting professionalism and leadership when seeking advancement. "You have to be at the next level," advised Steinberg. "Be the role you want to be, so that it's easy for others to see you that way," she said.

Excellent advice, but do women really know what she means, and how to achieve it? I haven't met Joan, but I know what she means, and she means gravitas.



### What is 'Gravitas'?

According to Wikipedia (and consistent with the Oxford English Dictionary), gravitas is Latin for: "weight, seriousness, dignity or importance, and connotes a certain substance or depth of personality."

In business currency, that intangible quality is equivalent to being seen, heard, and acknowledged in a positive way. It connotes the essence of leadership in terms of deliberate and strategic influence, and serves to make one more marketable, memorable, and trustworthy.

Why do women specifically need it?

Let's face it: The landscape is weighted against us.

Not only statistically, in terms of levels and promotions, but anthropologically and physically as well.

Men have historically been the literal heavies, in every professional arena—business, military, sports—and even the social: Think about who usually gets to sit at the "head" of the family table, and how even something as subtle as seat choice can be read as a reputation barometer?

Plus, men do tend to be taller, bigger, and, frankly, louder (and that's not biology—that's projection). And they're better at feigning confidence—faking it, so to speak.

So we need all the gravitas we can get to be perceived as management material.

### How Impressions are Made

Consider what I refer to as "The Elements of Impression," the six main impression-making categories that we are judged on: appearance, body language, carriage (posture), expression, tone of voice, and vocabulary.

Are your individual elements as elevated as they could or should be?

Packaging matters, and it matters more than many people know. UCLA psychology professor emeritus Albert Mehrabian famously developed a formula to assess how audiences respond to presenters, and discovered that a full 55% of impressions are made based on visuals alone—the first four elements of impression. Tone of voice—simply the pitch, pace, volume—accounts for 35%, leaving a mere 10% for the actual impact of content.

And this is where many women go wrong, by putting all their efforts into the product (content) and none into the packaging (visuals and tone), which is how your reputation really gets made.

## How Does One Get Gravitas?

Obviously, it's critical to have confidence, and maintain a solid sense of what you know and who you are. But even if your personal foundation is not entirely secure (and from my client experience, very few women feel that way consistently), it's critical to display the right signals.

Sylvia Ann Hewlett, founder and president of the Center for Work Life Policy and author of "The Sponsor Effect: Breaking Through the Last Glass Ceiling," recently discussed this issue at an International Women's Day presentation, indicating that "presentation of self" is huge, and executive women are 41% less likely than their male counterparts to get advice on appearance from their sponsor.

So take it from me:

### 1) Act the Part: Know Your Role and Goal

First, heed the words of former U.S. trade ambassador Charlene Barshefsky, who credited her success in opening WTO negotiations with China with this mantra: "The body speaks before the mouth ever opens." Barshefsky, a diminutive woman and first female in the role, won over her audience by intentionally and successfully exuding power and authority with every step, gesture, glance, and Hermes scarf.

### 2) Look the Part: Employ the "Personal Power Points"

Well-cut hair, polished makeup, stylish jacket, statement jewelry, designer bag, Mistress of the Universe heels—these are status symbols, as well as talismans, and our equivalent of the necktie or spit-shined shoes. (And before you whine about applying makeup, keep in mind that men shave every day; this is how we ready our faces for work. Plus, if you are younger, makeup confers maturity; if you aren't so young, trust me, you need the color.)

### 3) Become Fluent in the Language of Leadership

Learn to speak the Language of Leadership, which translates to precise, powerful, and positive communication. Say what you mean and mean what you say: Don't mumble, babble, prevaricate or disclaim—apologize—for your contributions. Use real and elevated words (hello instead of hi, yes instead of yeah) and interesting adjectives (spectacular instead of great). Use positive constructs (I can do this rather than I can't do that) and always be ready with a substantive response to ordinary inquiries, such as, "What's new?" ('I just got published in *The Glass Hammer*', rather than 'not much').

### Avoid: Fatal Distractions; i.e. the "Lip-Gloss" Ceiling

Finally, keep in mind that despite the most careful grooming and planning, involuntary behaviors can still stall or derail a career.

At the top of the danger list is upward inflection, or the unfortunately female habit of uttering declarative statements as though they ended with a question mark? (Read that sentence out loud.)

Twisting hair, nodding like a bobble-head doll, covering your mouth when you speak, inadvertent giggling, and lackluster handshakes are hard to spot in a mirror the way, say, we might catch a speck of salad in our teeth, but catch them you must, and then toss them forever if you want to play that elevated role and ascend to the next level. And if you don't know what you do, do badly, or need to do better, seek a second opinion from a trusted colleague or coach, or perform for the all-powerful video tape.

Then you too can go forth and get gravitas.

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